

ESPIONAGE:

One Solitary Flaw

The Swedish Government last week achieved the distinction of publishing the most fascinating piece of official prose since Lord Denning's report on the Profumo affair. The new spellbinder: the second of two massive documents detailing the career of Swedish Air Force Col. Stig Wennerström, 57, now on trial for espionage in a Stockholm court.

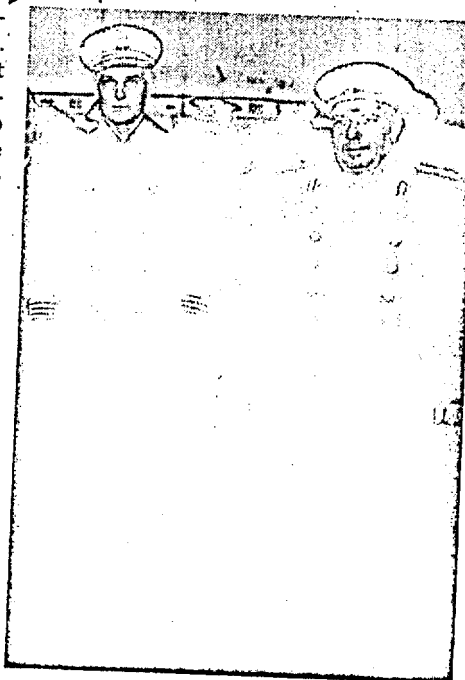
Wennerström, the Swedish report reveals, was recruited into Russian service in 1943 by Gen. Nicholas Nikitouchév, one of the top officers of GRU, the Soviet military intelligence agency. On the strength of that decision alone, Nikitouchév should enjoy immortality in the annals of Soviet espionage. For over the years, Wennerström kept a steady flow of the most highly classified Swedish and NATO documents pouring into GRU's Moscow headquarters. In fact, he did such a fine job that, in time, he was put on an unlimited expense account.

Despite the fact he was spying out of greed rather than conviction, Wennerström didn't allow the money to go to his head. He asked the Russians to bank his earnings so that he wouldn't arouse suspicion by living above his ostensible means. However, he was never loath to spend money when it came to cultivating friendships among American officers—friendships which presumably paid off handsomely after he was sent to Washington as Swedish air attaché in 1952.

A Medal: When GRU heard about the Washington transfer, Gen. Nikitouchév hurried to a Helsinki rendezvous to give his top agent a final briefing before he left for the U.S. He told Wennerström that he had been awarded high Russian decorations and promised him Soviet citizenship if he ever had to leave the West in a hurry.

Years went by without any such unpleasant eventuality arising, but finally Wennerström decided to go into voluntary retirement to enjoy the \$100,000 in back pay waiting for him in Moscow. Quietly, he made arrangements to fly to Vienna, where GRU agents were waiting to smuggle him to safety. But at the last moment he decided to delay a few days to attend his daughter's wedding—and that gave Sweden's secret police just the extra time they needed to accumulate enough evidence to arrest him. Sentiment, it proved, was the one fatal flaw in the make-up of General Nikitouchév's master spy.

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Wennerström with Soviet guests